

Addressing Trends in Alcohol Dependence and Abuse

A new study by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) uncovered trends in alcohol abuse and alcohol dependence over ten years. This study compared information from the NIAAA's 1991-1992 National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey (NLAES), and the 2001-2002 National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC).

Rates of alcohol abuse increased significantly over the studied decade, jumping from 3.03% to 4.65%. Rates of alcohol dependence dropped significantly over the same time span, from 4.38% to 3.81%. Alcohol abuse increased among all racial groups except for Native Americans. Alcohol abuse increased significantly for black men among all age groups. Alcohol dependence dropped significantly among all men, while female alcohol dependence stayed the same. Alcohol dependence only increased significantly among Black women and Asian men who were 18-29

Alcohol abuse increased between 1991 and 2001

years old. Among almost all other subgroups, rates of dependence either stayed the same or dropped, sometimes significantly. While heavy drinking and alcohol dependence have both decreased, alcohol abuse has increased.

Researchers have suggested many reasons for the rising prevalence of alcohol use disorders among minority young adults. These include stress associated with discrimination and socioeconomic disadvantage, the

successes of alcohol advertising campaigns which intentionally target minorities, and for immigrants, the stresses of acculturation. Also, these might be affected by the growing number of minority youth attending college, an environment noted for its high rates of heavy drinking.

See Grant et al., "The 12-month prevalence and trends in DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: United States, 1991-1992 and 2001-2002".

What Coalitions Can Do

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The American Medical Association's Reducing Underage Drinking Through Coalitions provides sound advice for addressing this problem:

Identify those factors in the environment that contribute most to underage drinking in their communities and work together to create positive change.

These factors may include illegal alcohol sales to minors, alcohol distribution and pricing practices, cultural norms and marketing promotions and advertising. Advertising, for example, helps shape young peoples' beliefs about drinking, particularly when humorous, cartoon-like characters or glamorous images are used. Youth see almost as much television alcohol advertising as adults. According to the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, young people (ages 12 to 20) saw two beer and ale ads in 2001 for every three seen by an adult, and an estimated 30 percent of youth saw at least 780 alcohol commercials in 2001.

Examples of environmental policy changes that coalitions may seek include enforcement activities to insure that merchants are not selling alcohol to minors, or social host liability laws, which hold suppliers of alcohol to minors (usually supplied at parties) liable for any problems that occur.

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